

PAUL ATKINS UNDERWOOD

(1902–1968)

PAUL Atkins Underwood, Professor of Byzantine Architecture and Archaeology, died on September 22, 1968, after twenty-five years of loyal and distinguished service to Dumbarton Oaks. His name will be lastingly associated with the preservation and study of Byzantine churches, mosaics, and frescoes in Istanbul. A major contribution to Byzantine archaeology and art history in our time, his work also has greatly enhanced the stature of Dumbarton Oaks as a center for the promotion of these disciplines.

Underwood was born February 22, 1902, in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, where his father was a Presbyterian missionary. He graduated from Princeton University in 1925 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture. Having decided on a career in that field, he continued his studies at Princeton and received the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Architecture in 1928. From 1929 to 1931 he worked as a practicing architect in New York, but the economic depression of the early 1930's, which severely affected his chosen profession, decisively changed his life. He went to Greece and for the next three years led a migrant life in that country, becoming familiar with both its classical and mediaeval monuments and, incidentally, forming a deep affection for its inhabitants. Returning to Princeton in 1935 he became a graduate student in the Department of Art and Archaeology, which was then at the height of its productivity as a center for the study of Early Christian and Byzantine art. Under the guidance of Charles R. Morey, E. Baldwin Smith, Albert M. Friend, Kurt Weitzmann, and others he specialized in these subjects. In 1938 he took a position at Cornell University where he taught history of art. But he found teaching not to be his true vocation and in 1943 he successfully applied for a fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks, where, two years earlier, a regular research program in Early Christian and Byzantine art and architecture had been started. He was to stay at Dumbarton Oaks for the rest of his life, becoming successively Assistant Professor (1946–51), Associate Professor (1951–60), and finally full Professor.

His first publications—two interlocking Notes on the iconography of an ornate pilgrim staff in the Museo Sacro of the Vatican and on the architecture of Bernini's towers for St. Peter's—came out in 1939–40 and clearly reflect



his twofold training, as well as the active and concrete encouragement which he, like so many of his fellow students, had received from C. R. Morey. Under the latter's leadership the study and cataloguing of objects in the Museo Sacro had, in fact, become a collective enterprise of the Princeton Department. Again combining his architectural interests with the type of research in iconography to which he had been introduced at Princeton, Underwood devoted his first years at Dumbarton Oaks mainly to a study of Early Christian baptisteries and their relationship to the *tholoi* depicted in early Gospel manuscripts. The result was a major paper on the "Fountain of Life" subsequently published in the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*. Mosaics, on the one hand, and Constantinopolitan topography, on the other, became additional fields of intensive investigation when in 1945 A. M. Friend, as Senior Scholar in Residence, enlisted his help in a comprehensive study of sources pertaining to the lost Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople and its decoration. Eventually, in the fall of 1949, this led to a prolonged stay in Istanbul, a stay which, in turn, set the stage for the second decisive turning point in his career. In the following summer, after the sudden death of Thomas Whittemore, founder and director of the Byzantine Institute, he was asked to take over the latter's work. Returning to Istanbul as Field Director of the Institute, he thus became engaged in the tasks which henceforth were to occupy him almost exclusively and in which he found personal and scholarly fulfillment.

From 1950 to 1956 he spent much of his time in Istanbul—always, as it were, on loan from Dumbarton Oaks to the Byzantine Institute—and he continued to pay regular visits to that city, usually in the summer, until 1961. Thereafter he devoted himself mainly to the publication of the materials he had gathered and to administration of the field work from Washington. When in 1962 the Institute ceased operations in the field, its activities were formally taken over by Dumbarton Oaks, where they had in effect been centered long since. A Committee on Field Work was formed and Underwood became its Chairman, a position he held until 1968.

The earlier work of the Byzantine Institute had consisted chiefly in the uncovering of mosaics in Hagia Sophia. Continuing explorations in that church, Underwood, with the able and faithful assistance of Ernest Hawkins, added significantly to the corpus of its extant mosaics. At the same time he undertook similarly systematic work in the Kariye Djami (where investigations had been begun by Whittemore in 1948), cleaning and consolidating its magnificent mosaic decoration and uncovering the frescoes in the parecclesion, of which only some vague outlines had been discernible previously under a layer of whitewash. Years of painstaking work revealed an ensemble of early fourteenth-century painting unique in the imperial capital and preserved in almost pristine completeness and splendor. The conservation of the Kariye Djami, the exploration of its earlier history, and the study and publication of its pictorial decoration became Underwood's major concern, but he also carried out important work in the Fethiye Djami (Church of the Pammakaristos), the Zeyrek Djami (Church of the Pantokrator) and the Fenari Isa Djami

(Church of the Theotokos of Constantine Lips). In 1959 after a visit to Cyprus he initiated work on mediaeval frescoed churches on that island, work which still continues as part of the Dumbarton Oaks field program.

The results of many of these activities were published in preliminary form by Underwood, his colleagues, and his helpers in the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* and elsewhere. Occasionally he also dealt with topics not directly related to his field work, as he did in his brilliant re-examination of the evidence concerning the lost mosaics in the apse of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea. But it was the full study and presentation of the mosaics and frescoes of the Kariye Djami which he had chiefly at heart. In years of quiet and steady work he prepared a model publication which in 1966 was issued, with a care corresponding to his own, in three magnificent volumes by the Bollingen Foundation, long a generous supporter of the Kariye Djami enterprise. The volume of text which accompanies the two volumes of plates, while essentially descriptive, incorporates many new observations and results—the fruit of diligent and independent investigation of the entire range of relevant texts and monuments. It is enough to mention the chapter on the technique of the paintings. The work received the Charles Rufus Morey Award of the College Art Association of America as the best art historical study published in the year of its appearance by an American or Canadian scholar. At the time of his death Underwood had completed work on a fourth volume—now in press—in which the relationship of the mosaics and frescoes of the Kariye Djami to the art and culture of their period is explored. Based on a symposium which was held at Dumbarton Oaks under his direction in 1960, it incorporates papers by a number of authors. His own role was that of overall editor and in addition he contributed a chapter on the program and iconography of the mosaics depicting Christ's ministry. The chapter was completed only a few weeks before his death.

Behind his solid achievements stood a personality upright and loyal, genial and patient, modest and unassuming. His consistent refusal to stand on his dignity—together with his slight physical frame and youthful features—always made him seem younger than he actually was. Though free of all pretensions, he yet possessed a quiet self-assurance sustained, perhaps, by an awareness of having found a task that was in full harmony with his gifts, his training, and his interests. Lecturing about his finds, as he frequently did—travelling far and wide in the United States and in Europe to make them known to large and always highly receptive audiences—he would refer to the good fortune he had had in being entrusted with such wonderful material. But it was through his own qualities of mind and character that he was able to take full advantage of his opportunities. Possessed of a strong sense of duty, he carried on year after year the heavy and often tedious administrative work which the field operations entailed. Considerate and utterly incapable of intrigue, he maintained cordial working relationships with colleagues and staff members, as well as with officials in Turkey on whose trust and goodwill the success of his mission heavily depended. Perspicacious and unhurried, he

methodically pursued his research, relying in the last resort only on the primary sources and on his own prudent judgment. Always the person receded behind the object. But in the objects which he tended, explored, and made known his person lives on.

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